Public Health Information Technology Committee

Partnership of the Washington State Department of Health and Local Health Jurisdictions

Public Health Information Technology (PHIT)
Assessment 2002

In the late 1990's local health jurisdictions in Washington and the state Department of Health began discussions around the organization of a collaborative planning process to address information technology solutions to public health needs. In 2000, a joint state and local Public Health Information Technology (PHIT) committee was formed to coordinate and spearhead this statewide planning effort. An exciting outcome of this collaborative process has been the allocation of Public Health Improvement Partnership funding to the PHIT committee to allow for a Public Health Information Technology Assessment.

Purpose
Information Technology (IT) and information management is an essential component of the environment in which public health activities are conducted. Local public health jurisdictions and the Department of Health use IT to do a wide range of tasks including documenting performance, processing funds, and monitoring health status.

The purpose of the Public Health Information Technology Assessment 2002 is to identify and describe the current status of the Washington State public health IT infrastructure.

Process
The IT assessment process will occur over the July 2002-June 2003 time period. During this time period a survey will be developed to collect information regarding the current public health IT infrastructure (the survey will be implemented at both the state Department of Health and local public health jurisdictions), the survey data will be analyzed, and findings reported. The surveying process is expected to occur over the Fall of 2002 with contracted staff coming to each local health jurisdictions to assist in the completion of the survey document.

Goals
The primary information collection goals of this assessment are to…
1) Develop an annually updateable inventory of computer systems, programs, and databases in place at the state and local level.
2) Develop an understanding of how public health is using information technology.
3) Develop a statewide public health focused Information Technology contact rolodex.
4) Establish a baseline for the technology infrastructure of public health in Washington.

Future
The future benefits of this information collection process can include: increased potential for cost-sharing of IT solutions, increased potential for grant funding procurement to address shared IT needs, increased potential for peer technical assistance and advising on technology products/solutions, improved practice of public health, improved decision making regarding IT solutions/expenditures, and collaborative problems solving of future IT issues.

Contact
For more information on the PHIT assessment, please contact a PHIT committee co-chair. Frank Westrum, Department of Health, 360-236-3105, frank.westrum@doh.wa.gov or Mary Ann O'Garro, Grant County Health District, 509-754-6060, mogarro@ep.co.grant.wa.us